

Division of Mental Health Update

March 18, 2005

Search Begins for New Deputy

As the process of finding a new deputy for mental health begins, Commissioner Paul Jarris said he is exploring the appointment of an interim deputy. In the meantime, Jarris said, the department is taking a team approach to managing the division of mental health.

Division Director Paul Blake is in charge of day-to-day operations, with assistance from deputies Sharon Moffatt and Barbara Cimaglio. Commissioner Jarris and AHS Secretary Mike Smith are overseeing the work to develop an approach for implementing the Secretary's February 4 recommendations for services now provided at Vermont State Hospital.

Before beginning formal recruitment, Moffatt and Cimaglio are reaching out to national professional groups to make professionals within the field aware that a new deputy is being sought.

"We have also begun talking to local stakeholders, to seek advice and candidates," Jarris said. "We welcome input as this process goes forward."

Jarris outlined characteristics being sought—

- credibility in the field
- policy experience
- good administration and managerial skills
- a team player
- a good communicator

Clinical Expertise on Quality, Safety

The department has been calling on clinical experts around the state to provide their expertise in helping to ensure the quality and safety of Vermont State Hospital patient care.

"We have been working with medical directors from the designated hospitals and plan to extend that group to include designated agency medical directors," Jarris said.

Positive discussions also have been taking place with Vermont State Hospital clinical and administrative staff and their counterparts at the designated hospitals regarding recent and potential transfers.

"These have been candid and very positive discussions," Jarris said, "and we are all focused on ensuring the coordination of appropriate patient care between hospitals. Our goal is to have patients receive services in the least restrictive setting, as close to their home as is clinically appropriate"

Jarris also said that he hoped to have a new clinical staff services contract with Fletcher Allen Health Care in place at an early date. Fletcher Allen Health Care is currently providing services on an extension of the old contract that originally was set to expire last summer.

CRT Directors Meet With VSH Staff

The directors of the 10 Community Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs statewide visited with the Vermont State Hospital staff last week to discuss the transition of patients between programs. The directors already have regular contact with hospital staff and the clinical teams, and are committed to serving individuals in their home communities whenever safe and clinically appropriate, rather than at Vermont State Hospital.

“We wanted their help in identifying any individuals whose needs could be met with existing community resources outside of a hospital setting,” said Division Director Paul Blake.

The group’s feedback is expected soon.

Futures Group To Meet

Secretary Mike Smith and Commissioner Paul Jarris have requested a meeting of the VSH Futures Advisory Group. The meeting will be on April 4, from 1-3 p.m. at the Skylight Conference Room in Waterbury. An agenda will be sent out prior to the meeting.

The group met frequently during the drafting of the division’s Vermont State Hospital Futures Plan, which led to then-Secretary Charlie Smith’s February 4 Recommendations regarding the future delivery of the services now provided by Vermont State Hospital. The April meeting will be the first for both Mike Smith and Jarris, and the agenda will include a discussion about the role of the advisory committee during the coming months.

According to the 2004 legislation creating the committee, “The [AHS] secretary or designee shall consult with the advisory group on all aspects of strategic planning, including methods of seeking public input, investigation of program options and policies, and recommendations concerning organization, operations, funding, and implementation.” The group ceases to exist, under the terms of the legislation, on July 1, 2006.

Move to Burlington Set for Summer

Approximately 50 division staff will be moving to Burlington this summer. Mental Health Division staff will be moving to the main Health Department building at 108 Cherry Street, with the exception of the legal staff, which is likely to occupy separate quarters approximately a block away. Once the space planning is finalized, the move is expected to take two days.

Although employing relatively few in number compared to the department’s 812 employees, the Division of Mental Health (without the hospital) accounts for roughly half of the department’s annual budget (\$105 million state funds in FY05, compared to \$210 million for the entire department). VSH’s FY05 appropriation was \$16 million.

Once the move is complete, the Division of Mental Health will be co-located with the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs. This represents a major step forward in the Agency of Human Services reorganization effort to integrate services.

State Hospital Census

At mid-week, the hospital census was 44. Some transfers have taken place, but new admissions have kept the number in the 40s range in recent weeks.

With regard to patient census, Jarris stated “Our priority is to assure that patients receive clinically appropriate care. We are not pursuing any arbitrary numbers or goals.”

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